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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INFORMATION REPORT

COUNTRY Indochina

SUBJECT Comments on Role of Chinese Population in Economy/
Society of Indochina

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1. Accurate identification of Chinese residents of Indochina as to area of origin in China proper is virtually impossible. It is only practical to classify them as to dialect spoken. A deduction as to their probable native province is possible in this manner. Grouping as to dialect is the tendency. In city of Luang Prabang, Hainan dialect is spoken by Chinese residents. In Vientiane, there is a mixture of Swatow-speaking and Cantonese-speaking Chinese. In Xiengkhouang, Cantonese dialect predominates. Chinese farmers (in the surrounding hill areas) speak Yunnanese. In Haiphong, Fuchow dialect predominates--particularly among small merchant class.
2. Mandarin is taught at most Chinese schools, and children of school age are becoming proficient in both Mandarin and their native dialect. Their elders are not making any attempt to learn Mandarin.
3. Chinese residents of Laos are occupied as merchants, bakers, (and a few) as farmers. The more ambitious are merchants-dealing in export-import trade. They have a flourishing trade in opium, which they acquired from Chinese farmers living in the hills, for export from the country. In urban areas, lower-class Chinese are in many instances occupied as bakers. Vietnam-area Chinese are engaged mostly in mercantile activity. There are about 50 thousand Chinese residing in Haiphong, with merchants predominating as an economic group in the Chinese community. Tailoring trade is competed for with the Indian population in larger cities such as Haiphong and Hanoi. Export-import trade is invariably cornered by Chinese.

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4. French regulations governing import license administration hamper Chinese export-importers seriously. In Haiphong, Chinese shopkeepers are permitted to import but five sewing machines apiece per year. Machines are Swiss-made and sell well in Indochina.
5. The religious practices of Chinese domiciled in Indochina are mixed. Most have no religious preference, and for all practical purposes, are without religion. There are a few practicing Buddhists, and (proportionately) still fewer Chinese Buddhist Temples. Many of the practicing Buddhists attend Vietnamese Buddhist Temples. French (Roman) Catholic missionary activity has attracted a modest number of Chinese, and Catholic schools have Chinese children attending. A number of Vietnamese missionaries have developed a blending of Buddhism and Christianity which they offer to both: Chinese and Vietnamese residents. Participation in the Cao daist movement is not evident among the Chinese population in Indochina.

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